

STATE HISTORICAL
SOCIETY OF IOWA

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

The Annals of Iowa

Volume 70 | Number 4 (Fall 2011)

pps. 388-389

Triumph and Tragedy: The Inspiring Stories of Four Football Legends, Fred Becker, Jack Trice, Nile Kinnick, Johnny Bright

Sarah Jane Eikleberry
University of Iowa

ISSN 0003-4827

Copyright © 2011 State Historical Society of Iowa. This article is posted here for personal use, not for redistribution.

Recommended Citation

Eikleberry, Sarah J. "Triumph and Tragedy: The Inspiring Stories of Four Football Legends, Fred Becker, Jack Trice, Nile Kinnick, Johnny Bright." *The Annals of Iowa* 70 (2011), 388-389.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.1594>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

McLester and Hauptman's series of books using the community history method are a rare and successful collaboration between academic scholarship and community memory. They have refined their approach with each succeeding book.

Triumph and Tragedy: The Inspiring Stories of Four Football Legends, Fred Becker, Jack Trice, Nile Kinnick, Johnny Bright, by Mike Chapman. Newton: Culture House Books, 2010. 159 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography. \$26.95 cloth.

Reviewer Sarah Jane Eikleberry is a Ph.D. candidate in sport studies at the University of Iowa. She is the author of "A 'Chief' Year for the 'Iowa Braves': Mayes McLain and the Native American (Mis)appropriation at the State University of Iowa" in the *Annals of Iowa* (Spring 2011).

In *Triumph and Tragedy*, publisher, author, and public speaker Mike Chapman adds to the body of popular writing on intercollegiate athletics in Iowa. His latest work jettisons the single-institution approach in exchange for vignettes of four celebrated competitors whose impressive lives were cut short. Chapman pays tribute to four great men, chronicling their origins, accomplishments, and honors and the memories that Iowans hold of the departed. As in his *Iowa History Journal*, Chapman attempts to deliver a historical product that is both educational and entertaining.

Chapman's finest contribution to Iowa's historical record comes in the first chapter, where he resurrects Iowa's first All-American athlete, Fred Becker. After two years (1915–1916) at the University of Iowa, the Waterloo native enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in 1917, later falling in combat at the Battle of Chateau-Thierry. American Legion Post 138 in Waterloo took his name, and in 2009 the University of Iowa Athletics Hall of Fame recognized him for his athletic performances.

Next, Chapman retells the recruitment and brief career of Iowa State University's Jack Trice. Trice, an Ohio native, followed his high school football coach, Sam Willaman, to Iowa State University in 1922, breaking the color line as the school's first African American football player. Trice died days after suffering fatal on-field injuries in his second intercollegiate contest. Trice is the only African American in the United States to have a college football stadium named in his honor.

Chapman's third chapter revisits the life of the University of Iowa's 1939 Heisman recipient, Nile Kinnick, an Iowa native. Kinnick's Heisman acceptance speech and letters to loved ones help readers understand how the entire nation swooned over the pride of Iowa, who tragically perished in a training mission in 1943.

The last athlete in the series is Drake University's power runner Johnny Bright. Bright received national attention for his athletic endeavors and for the extreme abuse he suffered during a contest at Oklahoma A&M in 1951. Although no penalties were assessed, photographers from the *Des Moines Register* garnered a Pulitzer Prize for capturing the abuse. After graduating, Bright prospered for 12 years in the Canadian Football League before working as an esteemed educator and public speaker in Edmonton. Bright died from anesthetic complications during a knee surgery at age 53. Several schools in Edmonton and the field at Drake Stadium are named in his honor.

Chapman's project benefits from his large array of experiences, his familiarity with regional publications, and personal contacts with his subjects' friends and fans. Unfortunately, he compensates for limited evidence by using spurious detail, extrapolation, and conjecture. He often makes baseless parallels between the athletes, and chapters conclude with clumsy assemblies of commemorative quotes. *Triumph and Tragedy* may appeal to book-buying sports enthusiasts with a penchant for drama, but most historians will be disenchanted by the book's meritocratic maxims, purely descriptive chronicles, and lack of engagement with scholarly literature.

Hmong America: Reconstructing Community in Diaspora, by Chia Youyee Vang. The Asian American Experience Series. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010. xxii, 200 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, index. \$75.00 cloth, \$25.00 paper.

Reviewer Joseph Andrew Orser is visiting assistant professor of history at the University of Wisconsin—Eau Claire. His dissertation (Ohio State University, 2010) was "American Family, Oriental Curiosity: The Siamese Twins, the Bunker Family, and Nineteenth-Century U.S. Society."

Chia Youyee Vang's volume is grandly conceived and precisely executed. Covering the period since the U.S. retreat from Vietnam — a retreat that left America's anti-Communist Hmong allies hanging precariously in Communist Laos — *Hmong America* frames the experiences of the more than 130,000 Hmong who came to the United States as political refugees via the lens of diaspora. Its true focus, though, is the experience of the Hmong community in Minneapolis and St. Paul, what some call the "Hmong capital of the world" (58).

Using extensive interviews and observations, Vang moves beyond official narratives of immigration and forced migration to get to know refugees "as people rather than as subjects" (4). Vang is well positioned to do this; she was resettled in Minnesota in 1980 at the age of nine after fleeing Laos with her family in 1979. *Hmong America* is the first